

Canada's changing times

Canada is looking to science as part of a formula that will bring future prosperity. But researchers question whether the government understands the nature of the scientific enterprise.

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"Research is an act of enlightenment for society. When fiscal climates are tight, selling enlightenment is tough."
Geraldine Kenney-Wallace, Chair, Science Council of Canada

"People ask 'Why spend money to do fundamental research in Edmonton when they're already doing it in the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan?' We're fighting this all the time. We have to convince them we're as good as Germany or the United States."
William Bridger, Chairman, Biochemistry Department, University of Alberta

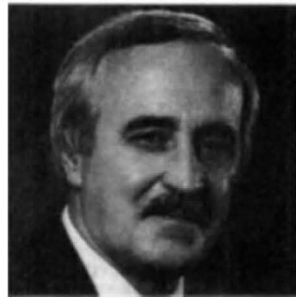


"A misunderstanding of the root sources of scientific progress can lead one to look for the quick technological fix for problems the solution of which can only come from a deeper understanding of basic science. The billions of dollars spent on the complex infrastructure for open heart surgery does nothing to eliminate heart disease. By contrast, when the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis invested comparatively modest sums in basic research on viruses rather than on artificial lungs, the development of a polio vaccine became possible and the prevention and virtual elimination of polio at very low cost became a practical reality."
Arnold Naimark, President, University of Manitoba

"To support [university-industry] initiatives while largely ignoring the need for a strong network of free and fundamental enquiry is absolute folly as other nations have already discovered."
Gordon MacNabb, President, PRECARN Associates and former President of NSERC

"The average Canadian believes that if something is technically sophisticated, it clearly came from somewhere else. If it is made in Canada, it is clearly suspect. But in fact, Canadian technology is generally superior."

John MacDonald, President, MacDonald Dettwiler and Associates Ltd



"As far as Canada's science policy, it's hesitant in its character. There has been a lack of leadership at the top for 30 years. But now the government is giving more attention to science policy than it has for 25 or 30 years. The preoccupation may be short-term, but the advisory mechanism for the Prime Minister has been set up, and that may be the right thing."
Gilles Cloutier, Rector, Université de Montréal



[On science policy] "There is a cacophony of voices. It's a thriving time, an exciting time."
Gordon MacLachlan, Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University



"We don't honour science in this country and we don't have a culture of science."
Charles Scriver, professor of biochemical genetics, McGill University

"Does Canada have a science policy? I am sure some of my fellow cynics out there are wondering whether I am going to have sufficient intestinal fortitude to give a one-word, two-letter speech, and then sit down. And I have to admit that I am tempted." (Speaking at the National Conference on University Research and the Future of Canada.)

Gordon MacNabb



"Even within the scientific community there are two populations: those who want to give the dynamic, productive groups what they need to stay in there, even if others have to lose funds, and those who think that everyone should get something."
Dan Skup, Director, Montreal Cancer Institute



"The politicians are looking for a quick fix to the lack of technology in industry. Had they funded biomedical research and allowed more world-recognized centres of excellence to develop we'd have more discoveries to exploit . . . the government is trying to enforce collaboration and collaboration should spring naturally. Trying to enforce an immediate industrial spin-off is not going to work and we are going to have a lot of unhappy politicians."
Richard Cruess, Dean of Medicine, McGill University

"Every political issue in Canada is ultimately a question of federal versus provincial power."
George Connell, President, University of Toronto